

DOG TOYS AND HOW TO USE THEM

"Safe" Toys

There are many factors that contribute to the safety or danger of a toy. Many of those factors, however, are completely dependent upon your dog's size, activity level and personal preference. Another factor to consider is the environment in which your dog spends his time. Although we can't guarantee your dog's enthusiasm or his safety with any specific toy, we can offer the following guidelines.

Be Cautious

- The things that are usually the most attractive to dogs are often the very things that are the most dangerous. Dog proof your home by checking for: string, ribbon, rubber bands, children's toys, pantyhose, cleaning products, chemicals and anything else that could be ingested.
- Toys should be appropriate for your dog's current size. Balls and other toys that are too small can easily be swallowed or become lodged in your dog's mouth or throat.
- Avoid or alter any toys that aren't "dog proof" by removing ribbons, strings, eyes or other parts that could be chewed and/or ingested. Avoid or throw out any toy that starts to break into pieces or have pieces torn off.
- Ask your veterinarian about which rawhide toys are safe and which aren't. Unless your veterinarian says otherwise, "chewies" like hooves, pig's ears and rawhides, should be supervision only goodies. Very hard rubber or plastic toys are safer and last longer.
- Take note of any toy that contains a "squeaker" buried in its center. Your dog may feel that he must find and destroy the squeak source and could ingest it, in which case squeaking objects should be supervision only toys.
- Check labels for child safety, stuffed toys that are labeled as safe for children under three years old, don't contain dangerous fillings. Problem fillings include things like nutshells and polystyrene beads, however, even a "safe" stuffing isn't truly digestible.
- Remember that soft toys are not indestructible, but some are sturdier than others. Soft toys should be machine washable.

Toys We Recommend

Treat Dispensing Toys:

- Treat dispensing toys can mentally stimulate and challenge our dogs. That can lead to alleviating stress, allowing them to focus for longer periods of time, and even tire them out. Thinking can be hard work!
- Kong type toys, especially when filled with broken up treats or, even better, a mixture of dry dog food, broken up treats and peanut butter. The right size Kong can keep a puppy or dog busy for hours. Only by chewing diligently can your dog access the treats, and then only in small bits - very rewarding! Double check with your veterinarian about whether or not you should give peanut butter to your dog. (See Kong handout).
- Treat balls, "Treat Sticks", "Canine Genius", and "Busy Buddy Toys" are a few examples of toys that require dogs to move the toy around with their nose, mouth and paws, to access the goodies.

Interactive Toys:

- Many of your dog's toys should be interactive. Interactive play is very important for your dog because he needs active "people time." By focusing on a specific task, like repeatedly returning a ball, Kong or Frisbee, or playing "hide and seek" with treats or toys, your dog can expel pent up mental and physical energy. This greatly reduces stress due to confinement, isolation and/or boredom. For young, high energy and untrained dogs, interactive play also offers an opportunity for socialization and can help them learn about appropriate and inappropriate behaviour with people and with other animals. The interactive play can be used to reinforce appropriate behaviour and you should end play when there is any inappropriate behaviour.
- Tennis balls make great dog toys, but keep an eye out for any that could be chewed through and discard them. They should be used as interactive toys only since repeatedly chewing on tennis balls are not good for your dog's teeth.

Comfort Toys:

- Soft stuffed toys are good for several purposes, but aren't appropriate for all dogs. They can be carried around, retrieved or even used as a pillow.
- Very hard rubber or plastic toys, like Nylabone type products and Kong type products. These are available in a variety of shapes and sizes and are fun for chewing and for carrying around.
- Rope toys that are usually available in a "bone" shape with knotted ends. Some dogs will chew through a rope toy in a very short period of time.

Get The Most Out Of Toys!

- Rotate your dog's toys weekly by making only four or five toys available at a time. Keep a variety of types easily accessible. If your dog has a huge favourite, like a soft "baby," you should probably leave it out all the time as long as it is safe for your dog.
- Provide toys that offer a variety of uses - at least one toy to carry, one to roll and one to "baby."
- "Hide and Seek" is a fun game for dogs to play. "Found" toys are often much more attractive than a toy which is blatantly introduced. Making an interactive game out of finding toys or treats is a good "rainy day" activity for your dog, using up energy without the need for a lot of space.

The Calgary Humane Society store "Creature Comforts" has several great dog (and cat) toys available for purchase.